



Chapter Three

Vedic Knowledge

Origin

“I worship Govinda, the primeval Lord, the first progenitor who is tending the cows, yielding all desire, in abodes built with spiritual gems, surrounded by millions of purpose trees, always served with great reverence and affection by hundreds of thousands of laksmis or gopis.”
(Brahma samhita, 5.29)

Vedic knowledge was originally imparted by the Lord into the heart of Brahma, the first created living being, and Brahma in his turn disseminated this knowledge to his sons and disciples, who have handed it down through history. (Sri Isopanisad p. 6)

The great sage, who was fully equipped in knowledge, could see, through his transcendental vision, the deterioration of everything material, due to the influence of the age. He could also see that the faithless people in general would be reduced in duration of life and would be impatient due to lack of goodness. Thus he contemplated for the welfare of men in all statuses and orders of life.

He saw that the sacrifices mentioned in the Vedas were means by which the people's occupations could be purified. And to simplify the process he divided the one Veda into four, in order to expand them among men.

The four divisions of the original sources of knowledge [the Vedas] were made separately. But the historical facts and authentic stories mentioned in the Puranas are called the fifth Veda. After the Vedas were divided into four divisions, Paila Rsi became the professor of the Rg Veda, Jaimini the professor of the Sama Veda, and Vaisampayana alone became glorified by the Yajur Veda.

The Sumantu Muni Aigira, who was very devotedly engaged, was entrusted with the Atharva Veda. And my father, Romaharsana, was entrusted with the Puranas and historical records. All these learned scholars, in their turn, rendered their entrusted Vedas unto their many disciples, grand-disciples and great grand-disciples, and thus the respective branches of the followers of the Vedas came into being.

Thus the great sage Vyasadeva, who is very kind to the ignorant masses, edited the Vedas so they might be assimilated by less intellectual men.

Out of compassion, the great sage thought it wise that this would enable men to achieve the ultimate goal of life. Thus he compiled the great historical narration called the Mahabharata for women, laborers and friends of the twice-born. (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.4.17-25)

Characteristics of Vedic Knowledge

Veda means knowledge. The Vedas are the original knowledge revealed at the time of universal creation. Until about five thousand years ago, Vedic knowledge was disseminated through an oral tradition. Then Srila Vyasadeva compiled the Vedic literatures for the understanding of the people in this age of Kali.

The Vedas deal with three departments of activities. These general areas are:

1. Karma-kanda, or pious activities which gradually elevate one to a more advantageous material position in this life and the next;
2. Jnana kanda, the process of understanding the Absolute Truth by speculative methods and philosophy, and
3. Upasana kanda, or worship of the Supreme Lord and, sometimes, of the demigods also. The worship of the demigods recommended in the Vedas is ordered with the understanding of the demigod's subordinate relationship to the Personality of Godhead.

Within the Vedic literatures one finds both material and spiritual subject matter. There are scriptures describing religious rituals, meditation and yoga as well as books elaborating on subject matters as medicine, sociology, mathematics, architecture, politics and philosophy. This mundane information is given so that human society can be organized in such a way to meet our needs and provide a peaceful atmosphere in society. This is necessary for the execution of spiritual life, which is the ultimate goal of the Vedas.

The four activities of religiosity, economic development, sense gratification and liberation are outlined in the Vedic scriptures. However, the fifth and highest goal of human life is prema - love of God. Scriptures such as the Bhagavad-gita and Srimad Bhagavatam deal exclusively with this foremost religious principle. From these scriptures we learn that, until we revive our original love of God, Krsna consciousness, we not be fully satisfied.

“That literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, pastimes, etc., of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest. “

(Srimad Bhagavatam 1.5.11)



Vedic Literature

Bhagavad-gita

The subject of the Bhagavad-gita entails the comprehension of five basic truths. First of all, the science of God is explained and then the constitutional position of the living entities, jivas. There is isvara, which means the controller, and there are jivas, the living entities which are controlled. If a living entity says that he is not controlled but that he is free, then he is insane. The living being is controlled in every respect, at least in his conditioned life. So in the Bhagavad-gita the subject matter deals with the isvara, the supreme controller, and the jivas, the controlled living entities. Prakrti (material nature) and time (the duration of existence of the whole universe or the manifestation of material nature) and karma (activity) are also discussed. The cosmic manifestation is full of different activities. All living entities are engaged in different activities. From Bhagavad-gita we must learn what God is, what the living entities are, what prakrti is, what the cosmic manifestation is, how it is controlled by time, and what the activities of the living entities are. (Bhagavad-gita, p. 8)

Srimad Bhagavatam

“This Srimad -Bhagavatam is the literary incarnation of God, and it is compiled by Srila Vyasa-deva, the incarnation of God. It is meant for the ultimate good of all people, and it is all-successful, all-blissful and all-perfect.”

PURPORT

Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu declared that Srimad-Bhagavatam is the spotless sound representation of all Vedic knowledge and history. There are selected histories of great devotees who are in direct contact with the Personality of Godhead. Srimad-Bhagavatam is the literary incarnation of Lord Sri Krsna and is therefore nondifferent from Him. Srimad-Bhagavatam should be worshiped as respectfully as we worship the Lord. Thereby we can derive the ultimate blessings of the Lord through its careful and patient study. As God is all light, all bliss and all perfection, so also is Srimad-Bhagavatam.

We can have all the transcendental light of the Supreme Brahman, Sri Krsna, from the recitation of Srimad-Bhagavatam, provided it is received through the medium of the transparent spiritual master. Lord Caitanya's private secretary Srila Svarupa Damodara Gosvami advised all intending visitors who came to see the Lord at Puri to make a study of the Bhagavatam from the person Bhagavatam Person Bhagavatam is the self-realized bona fide spiritual master, and through him only can one understand the lessons of Bhagavatam in order to receive the desired



result. One can derive from the study of the Bhagavatam all benefits that are possible to be derived from the personal presence of the Lord. It carries with it all the transcendental blessings of Lord Sri Kṛṣṇa that we can expect from His personal contact. (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.3.40)

‘Here [in Srimad -Bhagavatam] ten subjects are described: (1) the creation of the ingredients of the cosmos, (2) the creations of Brahma, (3) the maintenance of the creation, (4) special favor given to the faithful, (5) impetuses for activity, (6) prescribed duties for law-abiding men, (7) a description of the incarnations of the Lord, (8) the winding up of the creation, (9) liberation from gross and subtle material existence, and (10) the ultimate shelter, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The tenth item is the shelter of all the others. To distinguish this ultimate shelter from the other nine subjects, the mahajananas have described these nine, directly or indirectly, through prayers or direct explanations.”

PURPORT

These verses from Srimad-Bhagavatam (2.10.1-2) list the ten subject matters dealt with in the text of the Bhagavatam. Of these, the tenth is the substance, and the other nine are categories derived from the substance. These ten subjects are listed as follows:

- (1) **Sarga**: the first creation by Viṣṇu, the bringing forth of the five gross material elements, the five objects of sense perception, the ten senses, the mind, the intelligence, the false ego and the total material energy, or universal form.
- (2) **Viśarga**: the secondary creation, or the work of Brahma in producing the moving and unmoving bodies in the universe (brahmanḍa).
- (3) **Sthana**: the maintenance of the universe by the Personality of Godhead, Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu’s function is more important and His glory greater than Brahma’s and Lord Śiva’s, for although Brahma is the creator and Lord Śiva the destroyer, Viṣṇu is the maintainer.
- (4) **Posana**: special care and protection for devotees by the Lord. As a king maintains his kingdom and subjects but nevertheless gives special attention to the members of his family, so the Personality of Godhead gives special care to His devotees who are souls completely surrendered to Him.
- (5) **Ūti**: the urge for creation, or initiative power, that is the cause of all inventions, according to the necessities of time, space and objects.
- (6) **Manv-antara**: the periods controlled by the Manus, who teach regulative principles for living beings who desire to achieve perfection in human life. The rules of Manu, as described in the Manu-saṁhitā, guide the way to such perfection.
- (7) **Ēsanukatha**: scriptural information regarding the Personality of Godhead, His incarnations on earth and the activities of His devotees. Scriptures dealing with these subjects are essential for progressive human life.
- (8) **Nirodha**: the winding up of all energies employed in creation. Such potencies are emanations from the Personality of Godhead who eternally lies in the Karana Ocean. The cosmic creations, manifested with His breath, are again dissolved in due course.



(9) **Mukti**: liberation of the conditioned souls engaged by the gross and subtle coverings of body and mind. When freed from all material affection, the soul, giving up the gross and subtle material bodies, can attain the spiritual sky in his original spiritual body and engage in transcendental loving service to the Lord in Vaikunöhaloka or Krsnaloka. When the soul is situated in his original constitutional position of existence, he is said to be liberated. It is possible to engage in transcendental loving service to the Lord and become jivan-mukta, a liberated soul, even while in the material body.

(10) **Asraya**: the Transcendence, the summum bonum, from whom everything emanates, upon whom everything rests, and in whom everything merges after annihilation. He is the source and support of all. The asraya is also called the Supreme Brahman, as in the Vedanta-sütra (athato brahma jijñasa, janmady asya yatah [Srimad Bhagavatam 1.1.1]). Srimad-Bhagavatam especially describes this Supreme Brahman as the asraya. Sri Krsna is this asraya, and therefore the greatest necessity of life is to study the science of Krsna.

Srimad-Bhagavatam accepts Sri Krsna as the shelter of all manifestations because Lord Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is the ultimate source of everything, the supreme goal of all.

Two different principles are to be considered herein-namely asraya, the object providing shelter, and asrita, the dependents requiring shelter. The asrita exist under the original principle, the asraya. The first nine categories, described in the first nine cantos of Srimad-Bhagavatam, from creation to liberation-including the purusa-avatars, the incarnations, the marginal energy, or living entities, and the external energy, or material world-are all asrita. The prayers of Srimad-Bhagavatam, however, aim for the asraya-tattva, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Krsna. The great souls expert in describing Srimad-Bhagavatam have very diligently delineated the other nine categories, sometimes by direct narrations and sometimes by indirect narrations such as stories. The real purpose of doing this is to know perfectly the Absolute Transcendence, Sri Krsna, for the entire creation, both material and spiritual, rests on the body of Sri Krsna. (Cc. Adi 2.99-92)

“This Bhagavata Purana is as brilliant as the sun, and it has arisen just after the departure of Lord Krsna to His own abode, accompanied by religion, knowledge, etc. Persons who have lost their vision due to the dense darkness of ignorance in the age of Kali shall get light from this Purana.” (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.3.43)

“Completely rejecting all religious activities which are materially motivated, this Bhagavata Purana propounds the highest truth, which is understandable by those devotees who are fully pure in heart. The highest truth is reality distinguished from illusion for the welfare of all. Such truth uproots the threefold miseries. This beautiful Bhagavatam, compiled by the great sage Vyasadeva [in his maturity], is sufficient in itself for God realization. What is the need of any other scripture? As soon as one attentively and submissively hears the message of Bhagavatam, by this culture of knowledge the Supreme Lord is established within his heart.” (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.1.2)